



THE CENTER FOR JUSTICE & ACCOUNTABILITY

Bringing Human Rights Abusers To Justice.

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CENTER FOR JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY STEPS UP EFFORTS TO HOLD GUANTÁNAMO BAY PSYCHOLOGIST ACCOUNTABLE

CJA Responds to the New York Office of Professional Discipline With a Repeat Demand for Investigation of a Guantánamo Bay Psychologist Who Participated in Torture; CJA Also Calls on American Psychological Association to Expel Him From the Organization

San Francisco, CA – This week, the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA) stepped up its efforts to hold psychologist Dr. John Francis Leso accountable for his participation in abusive interrogation and torture of detainees at Guantánamo Bay. In a letter to the New York Office of Professional Discipline (NYOP), CJA reiterated its request for an investigation of Dr. Leso for his clear violations of psychologists' professional standards. Earlier this month, the NYOP, which is responsible for licensing and regulating the conduct of New York psychologists, denied CJA's initial request for an investigation of Dr. Leso because it claimed it did not have jurisdiction.

In its letter to NYOP, CJA stated, "This Office is obliged to investigate instances of possible misconduct by New York licensees, and it is the only office authorized to do so. Your authority and responsibility in this case stem not only from the State of New York but also from federal law... The Complaint details multiple instances in which, in his capacity as a professional psychologist, Dr. Leso crossed the line and committed misconduct."

CJA filed the original complaint against Dr. Leso on behalf of Dr. Steven Reisner, a psychologist in New York who has been a leader in the campaign to hold health professionals involved in torture accountable. "The Office of the Professions implies that since Dr. Leso's aim was harm and not help, he was not acting as a psychologist and therefore they don't have jurisdiction. But when a psychologist uses his professional expertise expressly to destroy the mind instead of to repair it, he is still acting as a psychologist and must be held accountable for his actions. It is the precisely the responsibility of the Office of the Professions to prevent such a person from practicing," says Dr. Reisner.

Also this week, CJA called for the American Psychological Association (APA), the largest association of psychologists worldwide, to expel Dr. Leso from its association and to recommend revocation of his license. In its letter to the APA, CJA states, "The APA has unequivocally condemned the abusive interrogation tactics that Dr. Leso recommended, including sexual humiliation and exploitation of phobias, tactics that are 'utterly inconsistent with Ethical Standard 3.04 in the APA Ethics Code, which obligates

psychologists to avoid harm.’ Moreover, the APA has recently taken the position that any of its members proven to have committed acts such as sexual humiliation in an interrogation context ‘would be expelled.’ Further still, it would be [the APA’s] expectation that the individual’s state license to practice psychology would be revoked. This evidence warrants Dr. Leso’s sanction, expulsion, and recommendation for de-licensure.”

Dr. Leso, a major in the U.S. Army, led the first team of mental health professionals tasked with supporting interrogation operations at the U.S. detention camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. CJA’s original complaint alleges that Dr. Leso violated professional standards for New York psychologists when he recommended a series of escalating physically and psychologically abusive interrogation tactics to be used on detainees, personally supervised interrogations where his tactics were used, and actually participated in the application of these tactics. Many of the techniques and conditions that Dr. Leso helped put in place were applied to men and boys held at Guantánamo and eventually to detainees held in U.S. custody in Iraq and Afghanistan. Neither Dr. Leso nor any other U.S. official involved has ever been held accountable for the cruel treatment of detainees at Guantánamo.

“The fight to hold Dr. Leso accountable is far from over,” said Pamela Merchant, Executive Director of the Center for Justice and Accountability. “The facts are clear: Dr. Leso participated in and personally supervised physically and psychologically abusive interrogation tactics on detainees at Guantánamo Bay. These acts are unethical and violate professional standards that obligate psychologists to avoid harm. The State of New York has a responsibility to keep psychologists like Dr. Leso from practicing and we strongly urge them to reconsider their position.”

According to Article 1 of the APA Bylaws, “The objects of the American Psychological Association shall be to advance psychology as a science and profession and as a means of promoting health, education and human welfare ... by the establishment and maintenance of the highest standards of professional ethics and conduct of the members of the Association.”

Merchant added, “Dr. Leso’s conduct is clearly in violation of APA standards. The APA has publicly acknowledged that such behavior should result in expulsion. The organization should stand by their statements by expelling him and recommending his de-licensure immediately.”

About Center for Justice and Accountability

The mission of the Center for Justice and Accountability is to hold personally accountable those who are responsible for torture and other severe human rights abuses. CJA supports efforts to hold accountable all perpetrators, including U.S. government officials, regardless of their nationality or past or current government employment. In most cases, the most appropriate form of accountability for human rights abusers is criminal prosecution in the same country in which human rights abuses have taken place,

as long as the judicial system satisfies international due process standards. CJA also supports the use of civil litigation, immigration proceedings, and other legal mechanisms and initiatives to make the truth public and to seek justice for past abuses, wherever they occur. For more information on this case, please visit our [website](#).